

Substance use and recovery awareness for business

Across the UK, alcohol and substance use continues to have a significant impact on workplaces. Estimates aligned with the Health and Safety Executive indicate that this accounts for up to 17 million working days lost each year, alongside wider effects on wellbeing, safety, and productivity.



You can get local support from:

Change Grow Live: **01904 621776**

York in Recovery Community Recovery Hub: **07767 132696**

What are the facts?

Workplaces that support staff experiencing substance use see improved retention, morale and reputation as a caring employer.

45%

of employees would rather hide an addiction than discuss it at work

Nearly half

of staff don't feel safe telling their employer

Stigma as the main barrier:

51%

of employees say stigma prevents people from seeking help at work

Fear of consequences:

43%

of employees have avoided seeking professional or medical help due to fear of workplace repercussions

Recovery is not just a personal or social challenge – it's also a workplace consideration

The impact of substance use and recovery in the workplace is significant. These statistics show that it can directly affect employee wellbeing, performance, attendance, and safety—making it essential for employers to create supportive, recovery aware environments.

How can businesses help?

1

Receive our Manager and HR training

Equip your managers and HR teams with the confidence and skills to respond effectively to addiction in the workplace.

This Manager & HR Training builds understanding of addiction as a complex health condition, helping reduce stigma and creating psychologically safe environments where staff feel able to seek support.

Participants will learn how to:

- Recognise early signs of substance use or addictive behaviours
- Respond to disclosures with confidence, empathy, and professionalism
- Manage risk while balancing wellbeing, performance, and safety
- Apply workplace policies and legal responsibilities appropriately

Grounded in real workplace scenarios and practical guidance, the session focuses on early intervention, supportive conversations, and clear signposting to support services—helping prevent escalation and improve outcomes for both employees and organisations.

With addiction affecting employees across all sectors—and often remaining hidden—this training ensures your organisation is prepared to respond with compassion, consistency, and confidence.

Ideal for: Managers, team leaders, HR professionals, and anyone responsible for employee wellbeing.

To book this free session please email: irc.york@york.gov.uk

2

Raise awareness among staff

Provide Recovery Awareness sessions to staff in partnership with City of York Council (CYC) and local recovery services.

These sessions cover:

- Understanding substance use and recovery
- Recovery sensitive policy
- Challenging stigma and misconceptions
- How to support colleagues
- Where to seek help for yourself or others

To book a free session please email: irc.york@york.gov.uk

3

Create a safe environment

Ensure employees feel comfortable coming forward without fear of judgement or negative consequences. This can be achieved by fostering an open, supportive, and non judgemental workplace culture.

“

One thing we've learned – creating a culture where people feel safe to talk can make a life changing difference.

Open conversations help reduce stigma and make it easier for people to access support and help people access the right services.”

Raising awareness

Share information

Share recovery focused information through posters (available from CYC), newsletters and digital content to raise awareness among staff and visitors.

This could include:

- Understanding recovery and substance use
- Promoting local support services
- Encouraging a stigma free workplace

Take part in national awareness campaigns

Such as:

- Recovery Month (September)
- Alcohol Awareness Week
- Mental Health Awareness Week

Collaborate with charities and local organisations to promote wellbeing and recovery.

Advertise and encourage participation in local initiatives

Promote involvement in local recovery networks and lived experience groups such as:

York in Recovery
(peer-led recovery community)



CGL (Change Grow Live)
Assessment and personalised
recovery plans



Support staff by allowing time, where possible, to attend:

- Peer support meetings
- Recovery events
- Local wellbeing and support activities

Family and carers support

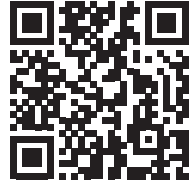
AL-ANON

Advice and guidance for family members affected by substance use



York in Recovery

Additional support groups and information



“

**Hearing real-life
recovery stories was
powerful seeing both
the challenges and
the positive change
recovery can bring
really opened my eyes.”**

Create a safe environment for staff

Create clear, accessible policies

Implement a clear substance use and recovery policy that outlines how employees can access support, raise concerns, and how confidentiality will be respected.

This policy should also offer flexibility, such as:

- Adjusted working hours
- Time off to attend treatment, appointments, or support groups
- Reasonable workplace adjustments to support recovery

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)

Consider providing an Employee Assistance Programme that includes:

- Support for substance use and recovery
- Counselling services
- Access to helplines and specialist services

This can form a key part of a workplace wellbeing offer.

Spaces

Businesses can provide confidential spaces where employees can:

- Have private conversations
- Seek support
- Access information about recovery services

This helps create a safe and supportive environment where staff feel able to reach out.

“

I didn't realise how many people are affected—it really opened my eyes to the impact of substance use, and how important it is to support recovery in the workplace.”

Good practice

What are other businesses doing?

City of York Council (CYC) are working towards becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace, setting out how employers can support staff affected by substance use and those in recovery.

This approach provides managers with guidance on supporting staff, ensuring employees feel confident accessing support such as:

- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)
- Counselling services
- Local drug and alcohol services
- Flexible working and wellbeing support

This helps ensure that no employee faces these challenges alone and can access support without barriers.

CYC and partner organisations are also developing networks of Recovery Champions to help staff access support more easily, provide accurate information, and promote a supportive workplace culture.

Recovery Champion role:

- Be a visible, trusted advocate within the workplace
- Provide basic guidance and signposting to recovery and support services (e.g. CGL, York in Recovery)
- Work alongside HR and senior leaders to influence policy and culture
- Promote recovery awareness and reduce stigma
- Attend regular training to stay updated on best practice

Recovery friendly workplaces recognise that with the right support, people can thrive—creating healthier teams and stronger organisations.

Training provided contact: irc.york@york.gov.uk

Normalise support for substance use and recovery by embedding Recovery Champions alongside Mental Health First Aiders.

“

**I didn't have to
struggle alone.
With the right
support, I was able
to take positive steps
forward and start my
recovery journey.”**

Call to action

Government evidence highlights that **employers play a vital role in supporting people affected by substance use and those in recovery**, helping to create safe, inclusive, and supportive workplaces.

- Businesses play a crucial role in supporting employees affected by substance use and recovery.
- By raising awareness and implementing supportive policies, businesses can create workplaces that are both productive and compassionate.
- Together, we can help employees feel supported and included, improving their wellbeing both at work and in their personal lives.

Many employers worry about getting it wrong—you don't need to be an expert, just be open, listen, and signpost safely. Small actions can make a big difference.

Five things your business can do today

☐

Display recovery awareness posters to promote a stigma free workplace

☐

Train one member of staff as a Recovery Champion

☐

Provide confidential spaces for conversations and support

☐

Review your policies to include substance use and recovery support

☐

Book Recovery Awareness sessions with City of York Council (CYC)

To contact CYC regarding resources or booking a workshop please email:
irc.york@york.gov.uk

Support for staff

Local support:

York Drug & Alcohol Service CGL (Change Grow Live)

01904 464 680

3 Blossom Street, York, YO24 1AU

changegrowlive.org.uk

- Free, confidential support for drugs and alcohol
- One to one help, recovery programmes, prescribing and peer support

York in Recovery (peer support network)

Community Recovery Hub,
2 Wellington Row, YO1 6BE

- Peer led recovery community
- Groups, cafés, and recovery activities

Family & Friend support

Al-Anon Helpline

- Talk to a member in confidence
- 7 days a week
- Free phone **0800 0086 811**

National helplines:

- Talk to Frank: **0300 123 6600**
- Drinkline: **0300 123 1110**
- AA: Alcoholics Anonymous: **0800 917 7650**
- NA: Narcotics Anonymous: **0300 999 1212**
- CA: Cocaine Anonymous: **0800 612 0225**
- Al Anon: **0800 0086 811**

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Call us: **01904 551550** and customer services will pass your request onto the Access Team.

Use our BSL Video Relay Service:

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Select 'Switchboard' from the menu.

We can also translate into the following languages:

我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)

এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় দেয়া যেতে পারে। (Bengali)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim (Polish)
własnym języku.

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

یہ معلومات آپ کی اپنی زبان (بولی) میں بھی مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔ (Urdu)

